



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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GOVERNOR

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**North Carolina Board of Transportation
Environmental Planning and Policy Committee
Meeting Minutes for February 6, 2008**

A meeting of the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee (EPPC) was held February 6, 2008 at 8:30 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building. Board Member Nina Szlosberg chaired the meeting. Other Board of Transportation members that attended were:

Conrad Burrell
Mac Campbell
Bob Collier

Tony Dennis
Nancy Dunn
Douglas Galyon

Cam McRae
Andrew Perkins
Lanny Wilson

Other attendees included:

Bob Andrews
Debbie Barbour
Donnie Brew
Mike Bruff
Alena Cook
Shakira Crandol

Donna Dancausse
C.A. Gardner
Jennifer Garifo
Bill Gilmore
Lisa Glover
Phil Harris

Berry Jenkins
Don Lee
Sandy Nance
Beth Neely
Amy Simes
John Sullivan

Greg Thorpe
Don Voelker
Dan Thomas
Jeffrey Crow
Julie Hunkins

Chairperson Nina Szlosberg called the meeting to order. She opened by accepting a motion to approve the minutes from the January 9, 2008 committee meeting. The minutes were approved as presented.

Ms. Szlosberg began by stating that over 2 ½ years ago the Interagency Leadership Team (ILT) was established to make sure that agencies were talking to one another and that there was some type of collaborative process in place that could move higher level issues forward. Since that time the EPPC has been receiving updates on the ILT since the ILT influences NCDOT's environmental program. The update for the ILT was provided by Mr. John Sullivan, NC Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Ms. Debbie Barbour, Director of Preconstruction, NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT).

Mr. Sullivan began by stating that on behalf of the ILT, he and Ms. Barbour were pleased to be in attendance. He mentioned that though Ms. Szlosberg had stated that the ILT was a forum for collaboration and discussion among different agencies that in fact the ILT was striving to be more than just a forum. According to Mr. Sullivan the Interagency Leadership Team is striving for activities that will lead to change.

Mr. Sullivan began his presentation by providing an overview of what he and Ms. Barbour intended to cover: who is the Interagency Leadership Team, an overview of the organization, the ILT's accomplishments of last year, and what the ILT hopes to accomplish in the future.

The ILT is comprised of the following agencies: NC Dept. of Agriculture, NC Dept. of Commerce, NC Dept. of Cultural Resources, NC Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources, NC Dept. of Transportation, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, US Army Corps of Engineers - Wilmington District, US Dept. of Commerce - National Marine Fisheries Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Dept. of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration, and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

According to Mr. Sullivan the team meets to champion and sponsor major initiatives and activities. He pointed out that the ILT has had a change in membership; the NC Department of Agriculture was added to the membership in 2007. Mr. Sullivan believes that this addition to the ILT will help strengthen the organization as they look at land use and transportation.

Mr. Sullivan mentioned that the ILT has a strategic business plan that was published in 2005. Since that time many of the ILT's prioritized activities have been completed due to the great staff work of the agencies.

The mission of the ILT is to "develop an interagency leadership plan for North Carolina to balance successfully mobility, natural and cultural resource protection, community values, and economic vitality at the confluence of our agencies' missions". Mr. Sullivan stated that a hot topic of discussion for the ILT has been how to balance growth within the Interagency Leadership Team's mission. He then referred to a slide which provided an outline of the ILT's 3 goals.

1. Develop a shared, comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) database. The purpose of this goal is so GIS can be used in all of transportation planning and implementation, as well as resource planning and protection.
2. Developing process and procedures so that local land use plans and transportation plans can result in projects that meet mobility, economic, and environmental resource protection goals
3. Look at our processes and procedures, in how we can come together and improve project delivery (improve the Merger 01 Process).

According to Mr. Sullivan, the first goal is very important because it has implications in all that is done in transportation. GIS helps to map and inventory assets so that it can be used in the planning process, starting with determining long range planning needs, prioritizing those needs and then developing the transportation improvement program. GIS also helps in project design. It is anticipated that through the accuracy of the GIS information they will be able to quantify impacts and eliminate alternatives from further study. Accurate GIS information will also allow for streamlining the amount of funds and time spent on detailed surveys during project development. And finally as they get into construction, maintenance and operations, GIS will help reference performance data on the system that they can feed back to all stakeholders involved in planning, design, and maintenance and operations.

The second goal looks at how the ILT can come together and blend the transportation planning process with the strategic planning process of the resource agencies. According to Mr. Sullivan this is a little different from Merger because it asks people to come to the table, tell about their assets, values and functions and then provide information on what needs to be done to improve those resources so that it can be incorporated into the long range planning process. Through this approach, planners can begin to consider different ways of mitigating and improving facilities.

The third goal is about improving the Merger process and working together to deal with the issues in a more expedited manner.

Ms. Barbour then talked about Goal 1. The purpose of Goal 1 is to develop a comprehensive shared GIS database. She indicated that a couple of years ago the ILT assessed the monetary needs of a GIS update. The update totaled somewhere around \$40 million dollars needed over the next five years. A business case was developed to showcase the savings that could be achieved throughout the agencies if the GIS information were updated. A request was made by the ILT to have the funding included in the governor's expansion budget; the funding was not approved.

Ms. Barbour explained that the ILT has decided to revise the budget request for this year, reducing the request to \$2 million per year for the next five years. She went on to say that the NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) will be submitting the revised request to the Governor for his consideration; this request includes an endorsement from the Secretaries of the state agencies within the ILT. She stated that the ILT is still trying to get the data layers updated so that they can expand its use in the project development process. It is important to note that although GIS is already being used in the project development process, more accurate data layers will help to expand that use. In order to pilot that effort, three projects have been selected out of the TIP.

Ms. Barbour explained that in the current Merger 01 process, GIS data is used to identify the study alternatives. After the alternatives that appear to be reasonable are selected, biologists then have to go out and field delineate the wetlands and streams for all those alternatives. She offered this example: If you have a project with 3-4 alternatives on a new location project, and the project is ten miles in length and the study area is at least 800-1,000 feet, biologists have to go out and field delineate the wetlands for the entire area. What they are now trying to do through the updated GIS pilots is use the GIS data all the way through to the selection of alternatives. Therefore, it would cut out a lot of field work and ground truthing that the biologists have to do and ultimately shorten the time between the identification of the alternatives and alternative selection, which conceptually reduces the actual production of the EIS for a project. This will be the process used on the 3 pilot projects selected.

Ms. Barbour explained that the pilot projects were selected from all across the state. The first is the Eastern Project Carey Road Extension in Kinston in Lenoir County. This is a project that is just about to enter the planning stage and is not currently funded in the TIP but was identified through Senate Bill 1005 for planning environmental funding. She stated that there is a longer time frame on this project and it is believed that there is good wetland mapping in this part of the state. She explained that there is also a near by project on Crescent Road that will be submitting a permit application. The goal is to do a post mortem on looking at the GIS analysis that was available at the alternative stage and comparing that to the final impacts of the selected alternatives. The

rationale behind this comparison is that since Carey Road is in the same area, they can determine the accuracy of the GIS mapping based on the current sister project on Crescent Road.

Ms. Barbour stated that in the Central part of the state they have selected the Carthage Bypass in Moore County. It is a project that is in the planning stage and close to the selection of alternatives. The project appears to have very few wetland impacts but may have historic resources that might have to be considered.

Ms. Barbour stated that in the Western part of the state they have selected the Sylva-Dillsboro Southern Loop in Jackson County. They are about to begin planning on that project in the next two to three months. It appears that this project was in the right stage of the process and that it has good steam mapping in the Western part of the state.

In summary they are going to be looking at these three projects to determine the practicality of using GIS to stage the selecting of the alternatives. They are also going to use it to prioritize data layers. If funding is granted through the expansion budget it will help to update some of the GIS data layers needed for the project.

Mr. Sullivan provided information about Goal 2. The purpose of Goal 2 is that local land use and long-range transportation planning result in projects that meet mobility, economic development and environmental protection resource goals. He mentioned that he would begin this portion of the presentation by talking about the Comprehensive Transportation Planning Process and the integration of that planning process with the Merger or NEPA process. He would then discuss the Coordinated Transportation Planning Workshop which looks at the requirements under SAFETEA-LU in rolling out a support for the integration process by bringing resource agencies into the planning process. And lastly he would discuss Board Member Wilson's invitation to the ILT to work with Brunswick County and look at their transportation needs via the Brunswick County Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

According to Mr. Sullivan, most of the work completed pertains to looking at procedure manuals for the different processes and elements that have evolved over the last three years. Therefore when they look at it holistically in its relationship to NEPA, it requires them to look at the transportation problem statement from the planning process and translate that into a NEPA document purpose and need. Mr. Sullivan explained that what has been accomplished is a development of training programs so that planners in the resources agencies can become familiar with how they might be involved in working with the MPO(s) and the Department to develop a problem statement.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the next step is linking land use and transportation plans such that those integrated plans become the basic foot print for the Indirect and Cumulative Impacts Analysis. Better coordination will help gain an understanding of the dependency between and effects of the two plans, which will help them to move forward without the detailed research conducted due to lack of coordinated transportation and land use plans.

Mr. Sullivan explained that in the planning process when they go through their different alternatives and scenarios of what may solve the basic transportation planning problem statement, they may throw out alternatives. Hence the question becomes, "how do they document that information in such a way that the information can be taken and used as technical reference in

NEPA so that alternatives don't have to be restudied?" The Integration Project will answer to this question and provide guidance on documentation standards that meet the needs of the decision-makers in both long-range and project planning.

Mr. Sullivan explained that if there are any unreasonable solutions due to environment or community goals, the question becomes, "how do they document those solutions that have been eliminated through the planning process so that they aren't restudied." Again, the Integration project will provide guidance on how this can be accomplished.

Mr. Sullivan stated that DOT and FHWA sponsored a workshop with their resource agencies' partners. The purpose of this workshop was to develop some steps for an action plan for data sharing and coordinating planning between MPOs and the Interagency Leadership Team agencies. They wanted to engage the people in the resource agencies that do strategic planning. The steps following this workshop have been created to include a contact list with all of the different agencies.

Mr. Sullivan explained that currently they are pulling their comprehensive plans, providing them to DENR, who will include them in a plan which will be referred to as a Working Lands, Resource and Environmental Plan. This Working Lands, Resource and Environmental Plan will look at all the different areas and connectivity between the different environmental areas and working lands. It is anticipated that this process will result in an overall comprehensive plan for the state.

Mr. Sullivan stated that US Fish and Wildlife Services have conservation plans for most of their threatened and endangered species. Currently these plans are available but are not currently being considered through the planning process. It is anticipated that through this process the agencies will bring this information to the planners, in order to be considered through the planning process.

Mr. Sullivan stated that ultimately this coordination is being explored in order to satisfy requirements of SAFETEA-LU which calls for coordination of land use plans in the transportation planning process. The ILT needs to consider impacts to environmental resources and they need to look at broad level mitigation opportunities for those different resources. It is hoped that by using GIS and this increased collaboration that more resources agencies will be considered in plans for protection of environmental resources in our transportation planning process.

Mr. Sullivan displayed a slide that depicted the flow path of work that the department engaged with Brunswick County. According to Mr. Sullivan, Brunswick County, who took the lead, was already working with the Department of Commerce and DENR's Coastal Area Management Agency in looking at strategic visioning for their county to address growth. Therefore DOT and FHWA partnered with them to develop a new comprehensive transportation plan as a pilot under this new process. Currently this plan is in draft form and will be presented to the locals before being brought before the Board of Transportation.

Mr. Sullivan then showed a slide that showed the the different resources and their relationship to projects or their improvements to the corridors on the state highway system. Mr. Sullivan stated that by using GIS and overlaying different maps they can begin to consider how the CTP may interact, impact or enhance some of these different resources and features.

Ms. Barbour then provided information about Goal 3. The purpose of this goal is to improve the Merger process. In 2007 the ILT launched its Merger training and trained 275 staff in the Merger Process. Additional classes may be offered this year for consultants that work with them in developing the projects in planning and design.

Ms. Barbour stated that in the spring of last year the ILT developed performance measures to determine how well the merger process is working. Those measures are:

- Time-between concurrence points
- Permitting-how long does it take to get the permit.
- Cost-cost of alternative selected
- Concurrence
- Environmental Quality

Ms. Barbour then offered a more detailed explanation of each of the Performance Measures

Time: Total process cycle time and time expended between all concurrence points. They also will look at the number of schedule changes made in the last year that are directly attributable to the Merger Process. They will observe if they fail to get a concurrence that ultimately results in TIP changes and delays.

Permitting: % of permits on hold or incomplete after they have been submitted to the agencies, as well as average permit processing time.

Cost- considering cost of the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA or Preferred Alternative) compared to costs of other alternatives presented in NEPA document, as well as the number of alternatives carried through detailed study.

Concurrence: Number of meetings needed to reach concurrence and percent of projects where concurrence was reached in one meeting. They will look at the amount of re-visited concurrence points and the number of times that they are able to combine concurrence points, which should be able to shorten process. Currently they are striving to combine a number of concurrence points.

Human and Natural Environmental Quality: Based on the type of project (widening or new location) and geographical location (east or west), they will measure the impacts per mile for wetlands, streams, number of relocations, etc.. They will perform a trend analyses for buffers, cultural resources and prime farmlands.

They are currently collecting the information from last year as a baseline. The ILT adopted these measures in the spring of last year. At the April meeting they will have a report out on the results from the Merger meetings from the last year.

Ms. Barbour stated that the ILT is looking forward to the future. The ILT met in January and have been in operation as a team for three years, during which they have completed a lot of activities under each of the goals and now they are going back to note the work that is complete and the work that is underway. They are noticing that some of the work that is underway should be handled solely by one agency and not necessarily require the work of all of the agencies of the ILT. So they

are trying to distinguish that and are also working towards prioritizing the ILT's work activities for the future. All coordination is aimed at bettering the process and furthering the mission of all the agencies.

At the close of the presentation Mr. Sullivan recognized fellow ILT member Dr. Jeff Crow, Deputy Secretary for the Department of Cultural Resources, who was in attendance. He stated that Mr. Crow is a great partner, sponsor and champion of many of the initiatives and has helped to lead many of the initiatives to completion.

Ms. Szlosberg wanted to learn more about the status of the GIS update. It was her understanding they would need \$40 million over a five-year period in order to bring the system up to where it really works but since they weren't able to get that accomplished in the last budget cycle, they are now looking at \$2 million every five years.

Ms. Barbour replied that the ILT requested \$2M for the next couple of years just to get started.

Ms. Szlosberg then asked if the amount requested had anything to do with the pilot projects selected.

Ms. Barbour replied that since the ILT was unsuccessful with getting the total amount initially requested, they would identify several layers, mainly cultural resource layers, that they could go ahead and update. They also decided to insert in their request details about the three pilot projects. According to Ms. Barbour, the ILT believes that if they can show cost savings on those projects, it will help to promote the business case and ultimately they will be able to show some tangible results of how the process can be improved while still being good stewards of the environment. She concluded by stating that they are trying to be a little more conservative with the request while at the same time showing some results.

Ms. Szlosberg asked if one of the reason why they chose cultural resources layers has anything to do with the progress that they have made in that area.

Dr. Crow from the Department of Cultural Resources replied that they are making some progress but that it is slow going. He went on to say that part of this new request for additional funding is that it will provide several new positions so that they can incorporate both historic structures and archaeological resources into those databases. Dr. Crow said that although they have someone working on that full time right now, it is estimated that there are about 70,000 structures in the files that have yet to be incorporated. There is also the idea that many of the original surveys that they did are now 20 to 30 years old and that some of the resources may not even be there anymore. Now they have to get out and see what is still viable and what is not. According to Dr. Crow, it is a moving target. They are assessing 50 year old structures, so they are working to identify historic resources that built in 1958 or before.

Mr. Perkins made an observation about what has been done to ground truth and to verify the resources so that the ILT has taken into account all of the negative impacts to the environment. He questioned how one would balance those impacts against economic development? Moreover, he stated that we don't have a very good track record with effectively using GIS, which could aid in identifying problems that we are facing. According to Mr. Perkins, the real issue is that until we

can produce Merger and environmental documents more expeditiously and provide decision makers with information on a quicker basis, we are not going to make any progress whatsoever. He concluded by saying that the decision makers are going to be very reluctant to say “yes I am going to give you the permit” if you can’t show a clear definition of how you resolved the environmental problem.

Ms. Szlosberg suggested that since we now have four secretaries that have signed onto the request for the expansion budget, the EPPC should also be supportive and draft a letter stating that the committee supports the business case as well. Ms. Szlosberg asked whether or not the committee would be willing to draft such a letter. She then referred the question to Mr. Galyon.

Mr. Gaylon suggested that they present the recommendation to the full Board on the next day (February 7, 2008), leave it on the table for 30 days and then vote on it.

Ms. Szlosberg asked whether or not her recommendation would require a motion from the committee. It was agreed that it would, the motion was moved and properly seconded.

Ms. Szlosberg asked is and how land use is incorporated into the Comprehensive Transportation Plan reports that the Board has received.

Mr. Dan Thomas replied that what they are doing is working with local areas to educate them on how their land use plans need to be developed and tied into the transportation element. He explained that it is a lot of education with local areas about the decisions that they are making and then looking at what their land use plans or land development plans reveal as it refers to the law. Local areas need to know what the laws are before they start working on the transportation plan. In many areas of the state where there has been a reluctance to have land use or land development plans or whereby the plans are very old, it is a matter of sitting down with them and talking very generally about visioning. “What do you want to look like in the future from a land use as well as a transportation standpoint?” According to Mr. Thomas, it is worked into the process as a sub-process and the land use and transportation elements are tied together.

Mr. Sullivan stated that through the ILT’s collaboration with the different agencies, one paradigm shift that has been observed has been the willingness of agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife, to get involved in the landscape issues. He explained that it is through collaboration and the review of major environmental documents, that they find these conservation plans. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is recognizing that their communication of their plans to other people is not effective in the Merger process; they must communicate it much earlier in the planning process. Therefore they are looking to programmatic strategies to work through issues. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has also agreed to work on the bridge program that NCDOT’s Transition Management Team is developing. The bridge program will use programmatic approaches to address issues associated with the endangered species act. The US Fish and Wildlife Service would like to go out to the localities and communicate the purpose of the conservation plan, explain the goals of the plan and how locals might be able to help add measures that will improve the watersheds and habitats in which the protected species live.

Ms. Szlosberg asked for an example of the integration linkage referred to as “unreasonable solutions to fatally flawed alternatives”.

Mr. Sullivan replied that if there is a federal project and there is a solution that goes through a resource that is protected under Section 4(f), you can not use federal funds if there is a reasonable alternative that avoided that resource

Ms. Szlosberg asked about the timeline for the GIS pilot projects?

Ms. Barbour explained that the planning studies will begin in the next couple of months. They will be reviewing information but it could be long term because they have to get to the stage of selecting the alternatives and then determining how they can use GIS for the selection of the alternative. With the Carthage Bypass she believes that they will be to the point of alternative selection within three to four months; the other projects will be longer term. They had to choose projects that had just started in the process or that had not gotten beyond the selection of alternatives because we would have already started the studies. So it is a process that will begin this year, and they will start looking at results over the next two to three years.

Seeing no further questions or comments, Ms. Szlosberg announced that last month the committee talked about their interest in learning more about the impacts in climate change on transportation. She informed the committee that since that time, she and staff had been working, reading and trying to gather more information on the topic.

As a result, Mr. Michael Savonis (FHWA), who is an expert at taking the science that was created in the international community and applying it to transportation infrastructure in planning, will be the speaker at next month's committee meeting.

Ms. Szlosberg announced that in advance of next month's meeting, they will send out a link to a pretty interesting report about this issue. An invitation will be extended to all members of the Board to attend the next meeting.

Seeing no further questions, comments or concerns, Ms. Szlosberg adjourned the meeting. The next meeting for the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, March 5, at 8:30 AM in the Board of Transportation Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building.

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